

UNDERSTANDING FINNISH FOOTBALL CONSUMERS' BEHAVIOR THROUGH FAN INVOLVEMENT

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International Business

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Suzanne Altobello

Date of approval: 13.4.2018

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Objectives

The main objective of this study was to identify meaningful differences among Finnish football consumers with different levels of fanaticism. The objectives also included the exploration of different aspects and motives that make consumers buy merchandise, attend matches, or recommend the team. The thesis also provides a framework that attempts to explain the consumers' intended fan behavior.

Summary

Sport consumers and football fans have been studied in numerous research, but less research has been conducted in Finland. Previous literature has identified that different types of fans have varying behavior and motives, but involvement is often characterized as the defining aspect. The conceptual framework was developed based on this notion and tested with an online questionnaire. The results reported significant differences between more and less involved fans and between fans that supported Finnish teams and non-Finnish teams.

Conclusions

The level of involvement was found to be significant predictor for intended fan behavior. In addition to this, the model where SPEED facets were added as mediator variable was also found significant as there was partial mediation. Moreover, the research found differences between Finnish fans that support local teams and teams from abroad.

Key words: marketing, consumer behavior, football, sports, involvement

Language: English

Grade:

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Sports and football business have experienced significant growth in the past 30 years. For example, the broadcasting deal for English top division, now known as Premier League, was only £191 for the seasons 1992 through 1997 compared with the latest broadcasting deal with Sky, which covered the seasons 2013 through 2016, that was worth £3018 million (Wilson, 2018). Finnish football has also experienced growth but in a much smaller scale. The increase in number of professional players depicts this growth well. The number grew rapidly after the launch of the new Veikkausliiga in 1990, before which only ten players were professional. After the launch, 87% of the players considered themselves as professionals already in 2008 (Szerovay & Itkonen, 2015).

Yet, Veikkausliiga has struggled to grow its attendance numbers, as they lag far behind the neighboring countries. Moreover, the reason does not seem to be in football as a sport itself, since English Premier League, Champions League, and World Cup gather a huge Finnish broadcasting audience. Moreover, many Finnish fans support a team from abroad instead of a local team and some even form fan communities (Soininen, 2016).

Much of the sport consumer research in the United States has focused on college level sports and four major leagues, while in Europe the research has mainly focused on the biggest football leagues in England, Germany, Spain, Italy, and France. Limited amount of research focuses on smaller countries' football leagues. Especially in Finland sport consumer research is a relatively less studied field.

This thesis seeks to gain a better and more comprehensive understanding about Finnish football consumers. It will not only focus on consumers that follow local clubs, but fans that support non-Finnish teams are also analyzed.

After the introduction, literature review will discuss the previous research conducted on sport consumers and it will conclude with a conceptual framework. The methodology section will introduce the quantitative method that was used to test the hypotheses proposed in the literature review. After that, the results obtained are analyzed and discussed. The last section discusses the main findings, implications for international business, and suggestions for further research.

1.2 Research Problems

Finnish sports teams are underperforming compared to the neighboring countries, especially financially. For example, the attendance numbers of the Finnish top division football are much lower than those of Sweden and Norway. As a result, Finnish football teams have had trouble with turning in profit and news of financial difficulties are frequent among Finnish teams.

This thesis will look at the marketing side of this issue through consumer behavior since there is still a need for more academic research to be conducted on this subject. For example, what can teams do differently and which aspects are the most important for consumers? In addition, are there major differences in perceptions and habits among different consumers, and how should teams address these?

In Finland, and in other countries with lower perceived level of football, there is a large subculture of fans supporting clubs that are miles away and often in other countries. There have long been debates in the Finnish fan communities about the effects that this causes to local teams and whether these fans are different from the local teams' fans. This thesis will also address this problem.

1.3 Research Questions

Specifically, this thesis will aim to study the following questions:

1. How can Finnish football teams enhance their brand equity among Finnish football fans?
2. What are Finnish consumers' main motivational factors for viewing matches, purchasing merchandise, and recommending the team to others?
3. How does fan behavior vary among fans with higher and lower levels of involvement with the team?
4. How are the Finnish football fans that support a local team different from the fans that support teams from other countries?

1.4 Research Objectives

The research objectives of this thesis are:

- To identify meaningful behavioral and perceptual differences between Finnish sport teams' consumers (i.e. from more fanatic to more casual).
- To explore the different factors predicting consumer behavior (such as attending games, recommending the team, or purchasing merchandise) for the more fanatic fans versus the more casual spectators.
- To evaluate how teams can enhance fan involvement.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this literature review is to critically analyze the existing research conducted on team sport consumers. This literature review will go through the existing literature conducted on team sports in general, including the match events, fan communities, and merchandise. Then, the research performed on sport consumer behavior is discussed, which will also provide the basis for the conceptual framework.

The last part of this literature review is the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework will provide a rationale for the quantitative method used in this thesis and it will combine topics covered in this literature review.

2.2 Team Sports

People play a variety of different games and sports. This literature review will focus mostly on team sports, since ultimately the quantitative research conducted in this thesis will concentrate on Finnish football (soccer) consumers. The literature analyzed focuses mostly on professional team sports, where consumers pay to attend the matches, compared with recreational sports (Késenne, 2014: 15).

Research has shown that different sports consumers do in fact have varied motives for attending matches and participating in the fan “community’s” activities, but many of the different professional team sports consumers, such as football, ice hockey, and basketball, are shown to have at least similar characteristics (Wann et al., 2008). That is why this literature review will, in addition to European football research, use research conducted in other sports too.

Football has become more commercial than it used to be in the past 30 years, but many teams still prioritize win maximization to profit maximization, although scholars agree that this

is case sensitive (Késenne, 2007). The 2016 Money League (Deloitte) report lists three key revenue streams: match day revenue, broadcasting revenue, and commercial revenue. Multiple studies have shown that match events have a positive impact on consumers and are an integral part of the consumers' experience (Underwood et al., 2001; Blumrodt et al., 2012; Yoshida & James, 2010). In addition, the broadcasting revenue and especially commercial revenue of the team is tied to their devoted consumers (Dale et al., 2005; Dionísio et al., 2008).

As stated, the football business has grown significantly in the recent years and the average revenue of a team in the English Premier league rose from just under 20 million to over 100 million euro between 1994 and 2004 (Garcia-del-Barrio & Szymanski, 2009). The similar growth has been recorded in other European football leagues, including Finland (Szerovay & Itkonen, 2015), especially after the commercialization of the sport in the 1990s (Késenne, 2007).

2.2.1 Sport Consumers

Fans are often described as the most valuable asset of a team (Kim & Trail, 2011), since they are the main source of income for teams. A consumer watching a broadcast of a sporting event or attending the event does not necessarily perceive himself or herself as a fan. The definition of a fan used in this literature review is that a fan is a consumer that associates himself or herself with an organization, i.e. a team (Bhattacharya et al., 1995).

Sport fans are highly involved and highly committed to their role as a fan (Underwood et al., 2001), which carries many implications. They are likely to be more committed, more emotionally involved, and have an enhanced brand awareness (Bauer et al. 2005). The high involvement also drives consumers to actively seek and spread knowledge (Dionísio et al., 2008; Urich, 2014). This means that consumers gain knowledge from other sources in addition to what the teams publish and what happens on the field. Many sport consumers are also active in social media (Wakefield, 2016), this interaction between fans can be also considered as value co-creation, which will be discussed later in this literature review.

Not all fans are similar. Different sport consumers have been studied and characterized in numerous academic papers. For instance, Dale et al. (2005) divided fans into four separate categories. The fan categories were “hard core” (fans highly committed to the team), “young ones” (new supporters), “sleepers” (less involved fans, including fans that used to be in the “hard core” category), and “yet to be converted” (spectators who do not view themselves as fans). This division considers several factors, such as what is the fan’s history with the club, i.e. if they are new, and the different managerial implications that, such as the argument that “sleepers” are the most affected by ticket campaigns (Dale et al., 2005).

There are also other ways to characterize different fans. The model, in Figure 1, was adapted from Dick and Basu’s (1994) framework by Tapp (2004). The model differentiates fans on two axis: attitudinal and behavioral loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty is related to the consumer’s own perception whether they are a fan committed to a team. Behavioral loyalty is about actually attending the matches. Based on the two axis, Tapp (2004) divided fans into 5 groups: “collectors” (who expressed the highest attitudinal and behavioral loyalty), “fanatics” (relatively close to collectors, but with little less loyalty on both axis), “repertoire fans” (who were close to the middle of the model), “committed casuals” (who did not attend matches but identified with a team) and “carefree casuals” (spectators who expressed low on both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty).

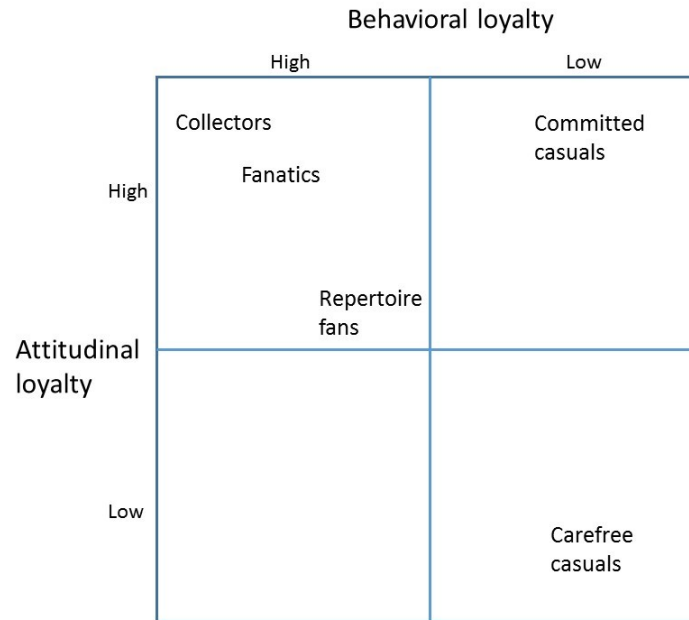


Figure 1: Adapted by Tapp (2004) from Dick and Basu's (1994) model

Dale et al. (2005) and Tapp (2004) both use loyalty as the basis for the division, for example, both characterized the most committed fans as similar in their match attending behavior. However, “collectors” and “fanatics” in Tapp’s (2004) division are so close to each other in their characteristics that Dale et al. (2005) use only one category for these kinds of fans: “hard core”. In addition, Dale et al. (2005) research looks at the time the fans have supported the team, which is not a significant factor in Tapp’s (2004) study. However, As Tapp (2004) used in-depth interviews, his study goes into more detail when scrutinizing loyalty, both attitudinal and behavioral.

The segmentation of fans is important in team sport research because different categories of fans have been shown to have different sets of motivations and behaviors relating to attending matches (Piipponen, 2011; Sutton et al., 1997), recommending the team (Dwyer et al., 2015), and purchasing merchandise (Dale et al., 2005). More devoted fans have been characterized as less price sensitive (Sutton et al., 1997) and less sensible to the weather or other events, such as birthdays, at impeding attending matches (Dionísio et al., 2008). This points to the conclusion that different types of fans have different motives for attending matches.

Based on the previous literature, the following hypothesis can be made:

H1: More involved fans demonstrate higher intentions to view matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others.

Moreover, because of the social aspect of being a fan of a team, sport consumers are studied as fan “communities” in many articles to gain a better understanding about the interpersonal connections (e.g., Dionísio et al., 2008; Kunkel et al., 2016). Thus, the literature on fan communities is analyzed next.

2.2.2 Fan Communities

The social aspect of being a sports consumer is considerable. Whether it is attending matches, wearing team’s merchandise, or recommending the team to others on social media, fans rarely act alone. Many scholars argue that the fan experience is intensified by others that are experiencing the same event (Underwood et al., 2001; Holt 1995). Holt (1995) also simplified this to the idea that fans do in fact enjoy other fans’ presence. Yet, Kunkel et al. (2016) state that other fans can also be a barrier to entering the fan community, since there is a stigma around the concept of the so-called “fair-weather” fans. The “fair-weather” fans are characterized as fans that support the team only when the team is doing well. This can be a barrier for new fans of the team.

The stigma against the “fair-weather” fans also highlights the value that loyalty has amongst fans. Tapp (2004) even argues that loyalty itself is a merit, and being loyal is rewarding for the fans. Fans affect other fans in both positive and negative ways although the positive aspect is in many cases the more intense one.

In many articles, fan communities are understood through social identity theory (Hedlund, 2014), which was developed by Tajfel (1974). This means that people identify as members of a group, and perceive to share the same characteristics as others in the group (Underwood et al., 2001).

Sports is about competition. In football, teams compete with each other, which usually causes the teams' fans to engage in rivalries with other teams fans. Dwyer et al. (2015) theorize that the in-group bias presented in social identity theory (Tajfel, 1974) is big force in the sport fan communities. The in-group bias means that the mere perception of belonging to a group will create bias in favor of that group against other groups. The in-group's rivalry with the out-groups builds consumer's identification with the in-group. This is presented as associating and disassociating in the study by Uhrich (2014), which also discusses fans competing and debating with other team's fans. Football hooliganism can be seen as the extreme phenomenon caused by this.

The fans that support a team from another country have different kind of communities. Social media and different discussion boards usually act as their communication channels and there are also other differences caused by the distance. Nevertheless, even though these fans do not necessarily perceive themselves as part of the local fan community similarly like local fans, they have a connection with the team (Ahola, 2014; Soininen, 2016).

2.2.3 Match Events

One considerable aspect of sport consumption is attending matches, and the broadcasting of events. Nowadays many of the top football leagues have broadcasting deals and the biggest matches gather a global audience of millions of people. During the 2014/2015 season the seventeen biggest English clubs generated over 2 billion euro of broadcast revenue, which was in fact more than their combined match day and commercial revenues (Deloitte, 2016). The match is the service itself, and the core of any team sport. In addition to being a huge revenue stream to the teams in forms of ticket sales and broadcasting rights (Deloitte, 2016), the research has shown that the match events have a positive impact on consumers and they are an integral part of the consumer's experience (Underwood et al. 2001, Blumrodt et al., 2012, Yoshida & James, 2010).

The live event attendance is one of the more studied subjects in the team sport research. The current research seems to suggest that the ticket prices are inelastic, which means that the

consumers are incredibly loyal to their team and rather cut costs in other expenses instead of not attending matches (Winfrey, 2009). However, Dale et al. (2005) suggest that lower ticket prices would attract more less involved fans.

The research by Tapp (2004) and Bauer et al. (2005) suggest that more involved fans attend more matches, no matter how the team performs. However, Tapp (2004) argues that there still is a connection between the team's on-field performance and attendance numbers, which contradicts the argument that the success or the team itself are not the most integral parts of the fan experience by Bauer et al. (2005). This might have to do with the fact that the Bauer et al. (2005) study included a bias towards "die hard" fans in the demographics, as Kunkel et al. (2016) argue that poor success affects less involved fans more, whereas lack of success has lesser impact on the devoted consumers. Furthermore, Garcia del Barrio et al. (2016) found that even though the fans enjoy their team winning, the uncertainty of the outcome is a factor that adds to their interest. If the victory is uncertain, it is more rewarding for the fans.

These support Kim and Trail's (2011) notion that fans are the most valuable asset for the team. This is because three main revenue streams (match day revenue, broadcasting revenue, and commercial revenue) are all more dependent on fans rather than the team's success. Although, success increases consumer's motivation to attend events (Tapp, 2004).

Viewership of matches through broadcasts is an area researched less from the consumer perspective compared with match attendance. Broadcast viewership is concluded to have similar motivations behind it compared with attending matches, with fan identification and fan passion being the defining factors (Hu & Tang, 2010; Wakefield, 2016). In addition, Tainsky and McEvoy's (2012) study shows that there are people who did not have a NFL team in their city, but identified with one from another city similarly like the people that live in a city with a NFL team. Similarly, in the Scottish Premier League broadcasting of the football matches has been shown to reduce pay-at-the-gate consumers (Allan & Roy, 2008). This implicates that the people watching the broadcasts and attending matches are not two separate groups.

Weed (2007) acknowledges that there are differences in supporters watching the broadcast in pubs compared with the stadium itself, but he notes that some of the same social aspects, such as sharing a communal experience and basking in reflected glory remain. In addition, Raney (2006: 352) argues that more often viewership is intended and active compared with

impulsive and passive. This is also the reason, why the football leagues can sell their broadcasting rights for considerable amount, and why most of the professional leagues are televised on channels that require a monthly subscription. The networks have realized the attraction that fans have for their teams and the competition surrounding the broadcasting rights has driven the value of broadcasting rights up (Garcia del Barrio et al., 2016).

Furthermore, Asada and Ko's (2016) research uses viewership as a substitute for attending matches. This will also fit this thesis' research better since a study measuring only match attendance would ignore those who are unable to attend matches because of many constraints, such as living in another country. Moreover, as previously discussed, fans that are unable to attend matches and have to rely on broadcast, can identify with their team similarly like those fans that attend matches. Furthermore, as discussed, broadcasting revenues for teams are sizable part of their revenue stream.

Based on the previous literature, following hypothesis can be drawn:

H2a: Finnish teams' fans and non-Finnish teams' fans demonstrate similar fan involvement.

H2b: Finnish teams' fans and non-Finnish teams' fans demonstrate similar intentions to view matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others.

2.2.4 Merchandise

Sport teams differ from each other when it comes to merchandised goods. Some have a large variety and selection and distribute into retail stores, while other teams' product lines limit to just the basic items, such as scarves and shirts that may not be as easily available (Szymoszowskyj et al., 2015).

Merchandise revenue falls under the commercial revenue in Deloitte (2016) report. For most clubs, especially small market teams, it is not the largest factor in the revenue streams, but it can still be considerable amount. Especially for the biggest teams in Europe, such as Manchester United and Real Madrid, which earned more from commercial revenue than they

did from broadcasting (Deloitte, 2016). One of the reasons this is the case only for the biggest teams is that these brands' products are sold and recognized globally.

In addition to revenue, team branded merchandise also adds exposure for the teams and according to Szymoszkowskyj et al. (2015) enhancing brand equity is the main reason for merchandising.

For the fans, merchandise is a way to advocate their team (Dwyer et al., 2015), which is supported by Dale et al. (2005) and Dionísio et al. (2008) findings implicating that more involved fans buy more merchandise. Bauer et al. (2005) suggest that fans wearing the team's colors enhance the sensed atmosphere in matches.

Furthermore, wearing the team's colors is part of identifying with the team; a study conducted in the US found that students were less likely to wear their school's colors after their team had lost (Jensen et al., 2016). This relates to the phenomenon of basking in reflected glory, introduced by Cialdini et al. (1976) that will be discussed more later in this literature review.

Regarding purchasing team branded merchandise, Kwon and Armstrong (2002) argue that licensed sport merchandise has the characteristics of a product that is usually bought impulsively. Kwon and Armstrong (2002) also found that the identification with the team was the only significant antecedent that affected the impulse purchasing decision of team branded merchandise. Therefore, increasing the team identification will lead to increased commercial revenue.

2.2.5 Word-of-Mouth

Word-of-mouth is important in the modern marketing. In this literature review, word-of-mouth means recommending the team or a match event to others or even just discussing them with others. This includes electronic word-of-mouth, where the communication happens on the internet. Word-of-mouth can benefit the teams' revenue with increased attendance (Wakefield, 2016) and more merchandise sold, but it also benefits the fans as it enhances the identification and connection to the team and to other fans (Dwyer et al. 2015).

As mentioned previously, fans value other fans (Holt, 1995) and like to interact with like-minded individuals and some fans even recruit others (Dwyer et al., 2015). Moreover, word-of-mouth is more effective when the receiver shares the likes and dislikes with the sender (Asada & Ko, 2016). Asada and Ko (2016) also acknowledge that even when word-of-mouth recommendations are not followed through by the receiver, for example the person receiving a recommendation to see a match do not attend the match, it can build salience.

The internet, and more specifically social media, has provided fans with many easy access platforms, such as Twitter, Facebook, and in addition, there are several fan forums dedicated to a specific sport or a team. The popularity of social media channels and online forums can be explained by the fact that consumers like to interact with likeminded individuals. Research suggests that fan passion strongly relates to social media usage and media consumption (Uhrich 2014; Wakefield, 2016).

2.3 Sport Consumer Research

Much of the sport consumer research is concerned with the complex motivations of consumers and most of the motivation frameworks are designed for match attendance (e.g. Funk et al. 2009; Dos Santos & Montoro, 2014). In addition to motivation, this section will look at value co-creation and Hedlund's framework (2014), which are implemented into the conceptual framework discussed in the last section of this literature review.

2.3.1 Motivation

Motivation is a widely studied subject in many areas, including sports. Theories include Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Iso-Ahola's escape-seeking model (Iso-Ahola, 1982). These theories are usually the basis for frameworks that scholars have used while studying consumer motivations in sports, mostly motivation for attending matches. However, there is no clear consensus on what is the best theory or framework to use. Most of the models used

by scholars include similar aspects, and the identification as fan and identification with the team is noted to be the most defining (e.g. Hedlund 2014; Hu & Tang, 2010; Sutton et al., 1997).

Current research has also tried to divide the aspects of motivation. Dos Santos and Montoro Rios (2014) argue that variance in attending matches is mostly explained by four factors: excitement, aesthetics, escape, and connections to the team and its environment. This is similar to the division used in Funk et al. (2009) SPEED framework.

SPEED is an acronym and stands for the five facets of motivation: socialization, performance, excitement, esteem, and diversion. First one of the five facets of SPEED, socialization, refers to the social aspect and the other people. Consumers at the events usually feel as they are part of the group while attending matches and they like other fans (Holt, 1995). Performance looks at the part, which values the level of play. Excitement and Esteem link to the feeling of excitement and achievement fans feel when during events. Esteem also relates to the phenomenon of basking in reflected glory (Cialdini et al., 1976). Research by Cialdini et al. (1976) suggests that fans associate themselves with the team's achievements and that they feel a sense of glory even if they did not contribute to the glory in any way. However, as discussed Bauer et al. (2005) argue that the success of the team is not the most integral part for the fans, especially for those that are highly involved. Diversion can be related to Iso-Ahola's (1982) seeking-escaping model for motivation. It is the desire of getting away from the normal life or schedule.

There is an academic evidence that consumers at a sporting event have varying motives. Piipponen (2011) suggests that different SPEED facets are important for consumers with varying levels of involvement and perceived identification with the team. For example, the "fanatics" may value esteem more, but the "carefree casuals" might enjoy the aesthetic elements without much of a concern for the outcome of the match. This carries significant marketing implications for teams, as they should segment the consumers.

Based on the previous literature, the following hypothesis can be drawn:

H3: The five SPEED facets of motivation are different for highly involved fans, compared with less involved.

2.3.2 Service-Dominant Logic

One of the current pervasive ways of understanding marketing, and especially sports marketing is through service-dominant logic (SDL) developed by Vargo and Lusch (2004). It is a theory of value co-creation and the idea is that the value is not solely created by a company, in this case a team, but in collaboration with multiple parties, for instance between the fans, the sport organization, and the personnel (Hedlund, 2014). This means that, for instance, a football matches' value is co-created by multiple parties. Fans are a paramount part of this co-creation, because they affect others' experience at matches (Holt, 1995) and they enhance the in-group effect on team's colors and merchandise (Bauer et al., 2005; Tajfel, 1974). The value is co-created even outside the event itself, for example by fans discussing the event (Holt, 1995; Uhrich, 2014).

It is not sufficient for a team to focus solely on their own activities, because of value co-creation (Uhrich, 2014), and furthermore, the part that fans play in this should not be understated, and therefore it acts as the basis for this thesis' research.

2.3.3 Hedlund's Framework

Hedlund (2014) measured the effects of membership and participation on attendance, purchasing of merchandise, and word-of-mouth recommendation. In his model, in Figure 2, Hedlund presents membership as the key independent variable. In the study, Hedlund confirmed his hypothesis that membership increased intention to purchase, attend matches, and recommend the team, and that participation increases through membership and its effects on the three dependent variables.

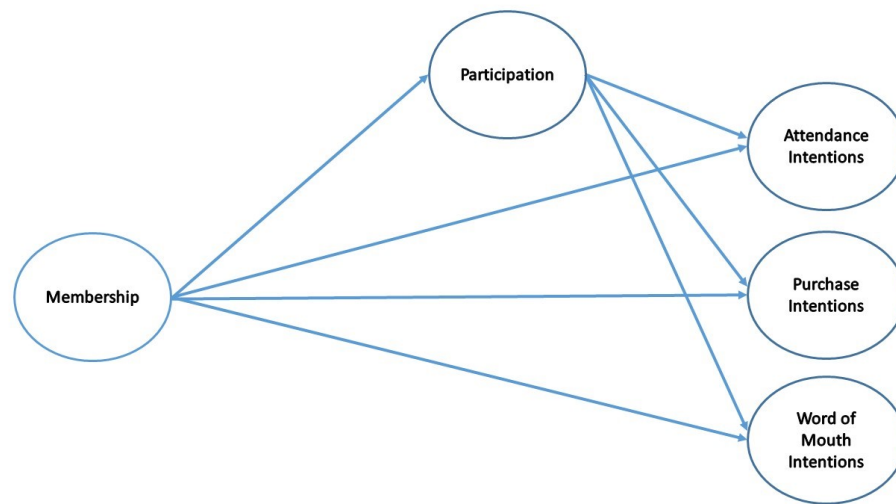


Figure 2: Hedlund's (2014) theorized model

Hedlund's theory is largely based on the idea of value co-creation and in the work of Vargo and Lusch (2004). By participating in activities fans experience more value which increases their intentions to attend matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others.

Hedlund originally developed and tested his hypotheses with US college sport consumers, which operate in a somewhat different setting compared with European football leagues. However, Blumordt et al. (2012) tested similar hypotheses in European football setting, but they had their focus on the perceived social good of the clubs and its effects on the consumers' perceptions and purchasing behavior. The theory is also supported by the findings of Wakefield (2016), who found that fan passion, related to the membership, affects social media usage, media consumption, and attendance.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

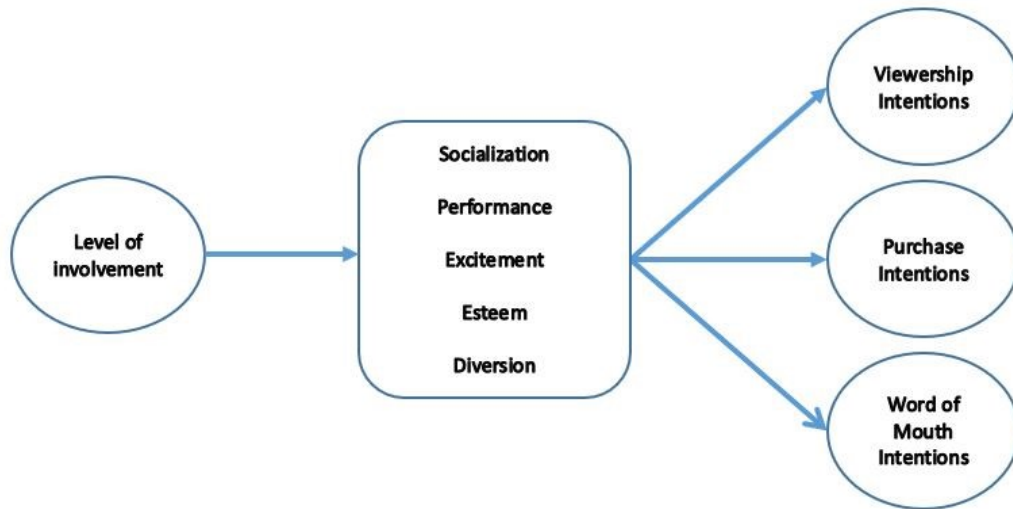


Figure 3: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 3 is adapted by combining parts of Hedlund's framework and the SPEED facets. This model will also extend on Piipponen's (2011) research, which looked at the SPEED facets' effects on fans with varying identification with their team. The hypothesis is that fans with different levels of identification will have varied levels of motivations, which can be identified with the SPEED facets. The SPEED facets will in turn affect the outcomes of motivation: viewership, purchases, and word-of-mouth intentions. These intentions were chosen because they represent a significant part of the teams' revenue stream, which consists of match day revenue, broadcasting revenue, and commercial revenue. All viewership (Hu & Tang, 2010) purchases of merchandise (Kwon & Armstrong, 2002), and word-of-mouth recommendations (Wakefield, 2016) have been proven to be more frequent among more involved consumers, but the SPEED facets of these have not been tested.

The conceptual framework is tested as the fourth hypothesis:

H4: The five SPEED facets act as mediating variables, and fans that demonstrate higher levels of involvement also report higher levels for SPEED facets, which in turn increases their intentions to view matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others.

In this conceptual framework, intention to attend matches is modified into viewership intention, because of the nature of the demographic, and because of the growth of broadcasting. The assumption is that many of the Finnish fans support a team from another country, which makes match attendance a less relevant measurement.

Originally, the SPEED facets were designed and tested for attendance only, but they are used in this model since they can be modified to measure fans' motivations comprehensively.

This conceptual framework is tested in the form of an online survey with Finnish football consumers who show varying levels identification with a football team from either Finland or abroad. The survey design is explained in the methodology section.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

This thesis utilizes both primary data and secondary data. Secondary data was discussed in the literature review section and it was used to develop a conceptual framework. The previous literature also provided the basis for the scales that were utilized in the primary research. The primary research consisted of an online questionnaire, which tested the conceptual framework and hypotheses.

For the primary research, a quantitative method in form of an online questionnaire was chosen as the research method because it was deemed as the most suitable considering this thesis' objectives. A questionnaire was also utilized in several of the studies that were discussed in the literature review. In contrast to qualitative research, quantitative research produces measurable results that are objective. The results can be generalized from the sample to the population and this suits consumer research (Yilmaz, 2013). The online questionnaire was the least demanding option resource wise and suitable for testing the hypothesis.

Because of time and resource constraints, convenience sampling was chosen. The online questionnaire used Webropol survey tool. Before sharing the survey online, the survey was tested with a few respondents to see if there were parts that were misleading or ambiguous. The questionnaire was posted on a Finnish online football discussion forum called FutisForum2.org in order to reach the desired demographic. In addition, the questionnaire was shared on social media, and participants were asked to share the link to others that could be interested in the topic. The questionnaire was targeted at football consumers, and consumers that did not follow football at all, were asked to exit the survey. A low response rate is typical for online surveys, and that is why the link was spread to a large number of people. The link to the questionnaire was open from March 5th 2018 to March 9th.

All the respondents were informed that the questionnaire's results would only be used for a bachelor's thesis, and that the responses would be confidential and anonymous. All of the respondents participated voluntarily.

3.2 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire discussed in this section can be found in Appendix 1.

The questionnaire was divided into six pages. In the first page, the respondents were asked to indicate that they were Finnish, what their favorite team was, and to select which fan behaviors apply to them. Based on the last question, if they did not follow their favorite team on social media, attend matches, or buy merchandise, on the following page they were asked to specify why they did not perform the activities mentioned previously. These open-ended questions were designed to give some qualitative data and to gather unrestricted opinions from the respondents.

The third page asked the respondents to rate the statements on a five-point Likert-type scale, where the options ranged from "Strongly disagree" to "Strongly agree". There were nine statements that measured fan involvement and they were modified from membership statements from Hedlund's study (2014). The fourth page measured the SPEED facets. The respondents were asked to rate the ten statements, two for each of the five facets, on a five-point Likert-type scale, from "Not important at all" to "Very important". The SPEED scales were the same that were used in Funk et al. (2009) research.

The fifth page also asked the respondents to rate nine statements, similarly like page three. The statements were taken from Hedlund (2014) study, and they were meant to measure word-of-mouth intention, purchase intention, and viewership intention. There were three statements for each of the intentions. Viewership was modified from Hedlund's attendance intention statements. The purpose of this was to include fans that could not attend matches for some reason, i.e. living in another country. In addition, streaming matches is coming more common as broadcasting revenues for teams are increasing, as discussed in the literature review.

The sixth page had questions about the demographics, such as age and gender. The respondents were also asked to indicate where they found the survey. In addition to these, there was an open-ended question that asked the respondents opinion about how their favorite team could increase fan involvement in the team activities.

3.3 Sample

As mentioned, the sampling method used in this research was convenience sampling. All the respondents participated voluntarily. Since convenience sampling was used, most the respondents shared similar demographics, i.e. almost all of the respondents were male. This could have an effect on the results. However, due to the limited resources of a bachelor's thesis, a convenience sample was the only viable option for gathering a large number of respondents.

In total, the questionnaire had 156 responses. One of the responses was omitted as invalid since the respondent was Dutch.

74% of the respondents were reached via an online football discussion board. Therefore it is not surprising that the mean score for the involvement is high. This was expected since sports, and football especially, are high involvement industries (Underwood et al., 2001).

3.4 Limitations

There were a number of limitations that should be acknowledges regarding the quantitative method used in this thesis. Convenience sampling caused a number of limitations. As discussed in the previous section, there is an unequal distribution of gender as 97% of the respondents were male. While it is also noted that males are typically more likely to attend matches (e.g., Bauer et al. 2005), the sample used in this thesis is not representative. This means that the results cannot be extrapolated to both genders with full confidence.

In addition, the sample is quite small for a quantitative research. This is salient while studying non-Finnish teams' fans since there are only 26 of them, compared with 129 Finnish teams' fans.

Another limitation is the survey language. Because the survey was in English and most of the respondents were Finnish, it is reasonable to assume that most of them are not native in English and might have varying proficiencies. To counter this the survey was designed to use common vocabulary and simple English to avoid misunderstandings and lower the number of dropouts. Because the survey was conducted online, the respondents did not have an option to ask questions to help them understand the questions they did not understand, which increases the probability that there were some misunderstandings.

For the scales that were used in this thesis, some of them had a lower reliability score, but they were utilized in the data analysis. The limitations that this incurs is acknowledged and discussed in the reliability analysis section.

Even though the questionnaire was distributed to a large number of people, lack of interest in the topic is not considered a limitation in this research. This is because football fans are highly involved and most of the respondents recorded high involvement levels also in this questionnaire. This is discussed further in the following section. In addition, no outliers were identified.

4. FINDINGS

This section will discuss the findings of the research. First, the sample profile is discussed, then a reliability test is conducted for the scales used, and lastly hypotheses established in the literature review are tested with IBM SPSS software.

4.1 Sample Profile

The total number of valid responses was 155. The age of the sample ranged from 18 to 53, while 56.8% of the respondents were under 30 years old. There was an unequal distribution of gender since males were responsible for 150 responses. This was expected, since the 74.2% of the respondents were reached via online discussion board, which has a male dominant user base. The sample was also skewed towards more involved fans, which is demonstrated by the results. For example, the median score on the involvement scale was 4.56 on a 1 to 5 scale. This is typical in football consumer research (Underwood et al. 2001) and thus was expected in this research as well.

Because the research focused only on Finnish respondents, one of the responses was omitted because the respondent was Dutch.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Originally, the survey had nine scales: one for level of involvement, one for each of the five SPEED facets, and one for each of the three types of intentions. After combining the three intentions and five SPEED facets into indexes, there were nine scales to analyze. A reliability analysis was conducted on SPSS for each of these to see if the items in these scales were had internal consistency and whether the scales could be used to analyze the results further. Cronbach's alpha was chosen as the measurement scale for reliability analysis. An alpha

above 0.7 is considered reliable in most of the research as higher values indicate higher internal consistency (Peterson, 1994). The Cronbach's alphas for each of the scales can be found in the table on Figure 4:

SCALE	CRONBACH'S ALPHA	NUMBER OF ITEMS
Fan Involvement	0,881	9
Socialization	0,908	2
Performance	0,685	2
Excitement	0,672	2
Esteem	0,812	2
Diversion	0,826	2
SPEED facets	0.623	5
Intention to Purchase Merchandise	0,976	3
Viewership Intention	0,904	3
Word-of-Mouth Intention	0,947	3
Three intentions combined	0.616	3

Figure 4: Cronbach's alpha calculated for each scale

As seen on Figure 4, the alpha's are all over the 0.7 or relatively close to it. Even though, four of the scales are below 0.7, they are very close to it and in addition, they have been found reliable in the previous research (Funk et al. 2009). The fact that two of the SPEED facets and the SPEED and intentions indexes are below the 0.7 mark is a limitation, but because of the facts mentioned previously, they are still utilized in the data analysis, but also acknowledged as a limitation.

4.3 Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses presented in the literature review section were tested with separate tests. Some of the hypotheses required independent t-tests while the rest utilized a linear regression analysis. For the t-tests, the sample needed to be divided into two categories: high involvement and low involvement fans. This was done by taking the mean score for the fan

involvement scale (4,556) and dividing the sample into two categories depending on if they scored below or above the median. The scores equal to the mean were in the low involvement category.

H1: More involved fans demonstrate higher intentions to view matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others.

Group Statistics					
	Involvement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Viewership	1,00	91	4,5385	,76782	,08049
	2,00	64	4,9531	,16658	,02082
Merchandise	1,00	91	2,9267	,92001	,09644
	2,00	64	3,9635	,98868	,12358
WoM	1,00	91	3,9231	,88900	,09319
	2,00	64	4,6094	,53305	,06663

Independent Samples Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Viewership	Equal variances assumed	49,642	,000	-4,247	153	,000	-,41466	,09764	-,60756	-,22177
	Equal variances not assumed			-4,988	101,799	,000	-,41466	,08314	-,57957	-,24975
Merchandise	Equal variances assumed	,394	,531	-6,698	153	,000	-1,03680	,15480	-1,34262	-,73098
	Equal variances not assumed			-6,614	129,483	,000	-1,03680	,15676	-1,34695	-,72665
WoM	Equal variances assumed	5,781	,017	-5,515	153	,000	-,68630	,12444	-,93215	-,44045
	Equal variances not assumed			-5,991	149,663	,000	-,68630	,11456	-,91267	-,45993

Figure 5: Group Statistics and Independent Samples test for H1

As displayed in Figure 5, High involvement fans reported significantly higher viewership intention ($M = 4.95$, $SD = .17$) than low involvement fans ($M = 4.54$, $SD = .77$) ($t(155) = -4.247$ $p < .001$). High involvement fans also reported significantly higher intention to purchase merchandise ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .99$) than low involvement fans ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .92$) ($t(155) = -6.698$ $p < .001$). This was also the case for the intended word-of-mouth recommendations, where high involvement fans reported significantly higher intentions to recommend the team ($M = 4.61$, $SD = .53$) than low involvement fans ($M = 3.92$, $SD = .89$) ($t(155) = -5.515$ $p < .001$). These results support the first hypothesis.

H2a: Finnish teams' fans and non-Finnish teams' fans demonstrate similar fan involvement.

Group Statistics					
	Favorite football team	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Involvement	Finnish team	129	4,4238	,53948	,04750
	Team from abroad	26	3,9487	,71404	,14004

Independent Samples Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Involvement	Equal variances assumed	6,643	,011	3,866	153	,000	,47505	,12289	,23227	,71784
	Equal variances not assumed			3,213	31,003	,003	,47505	,14787	,17347	,77664

Figure 6: Group Statistics and Independent Samples test for H2a

The results displayed in Figure 6 show that Finnish teams' fans reported significantly higher involvement levels ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .54$) than non-Finnish teams' fans ($M = 3.95$, $SD = .71$) ($t(155) = 3.866$ $p < .001$). This result contradicts the H2a.

H2b: Finnish teams' fans and non-Finnish teams' fans demonstrate similar intentions to view matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others.

Group Statistics					
	Favorite football team	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Viewership	Finnish team	129	4,7881	,52859	,04654
	Team from abroad	26	4,3205	,91156	,17877
Merchandise	Finnish team	129	3,3953	1,08874	,09586
	Team from abroad	26	3,1538	1,00324	,19675
WoM	Finnish team	129	4,3075	,77573	,06830
	Team from abroad	26	3,7051	,93489	,18335

Independent Samples Test										
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Viewership	Equal variances assumed	16,384	,000	3,578	153	,000	,46760	,13068	,20943	,72577
	Equal variances not assumed			2,531	28,478	,017	,46760	,18473	,08948	,84572
Merchandise	Equal variances assumed	1,524	,219	1,045	153	,298	,24150	,23115	-,21515	,69815
	Equal variances not assumed			1,103	37,860	,277	,24150	,21886	-,20161	,68462
WoM	Equal variances assumed	,589	,444	3,486	153	,001	,60237	,17282	,26095	,94378
	Equal variances not assumed			3,079	32,298	,004	,60237	,19565	,20397	1,00076

Figure 7: Group Statistics and Independent Samples test for H2b

Results in Figure 7 display that Finnish teams' fans reported significantly higher viewership intentions ($M = 4.79$, $SD = .53$) than non-Finnish teams' fans ($M = 4.32$, $SD = .91$) ($t(155) = 3.578$ $p < .001$). For word-of-mouth intention, Finnish teams' fans reported significantly higher levels ($M = 4.31$, $SD = .78$) compared with non-Finnish teams' fans ($M = 3.71$, $SD = .93$) ($t(155) = 3.486$ $p = .001$). However, for merchandise purchase intention there was no significant difference between Finnish teams' fans and non-Finnish teams' fans. This means that H2b is only partly supported. However, it should be noted for both H2a and H2b that the sample size of non-Finnish teams' fans is 26, and hence the results cannot be interpreted with full confidence.

H3: The five SPEED facets of motivation are different for highly involved fans, compared with less involved.

Group Statistics					
	Involvement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Socialization	1,00	91	3,5220	,99139	,10393
	2,00	64	4,1719	,78790	,09849
Performance	1,00	91	3,8297	,71577	,07503
	2,00	64	4,1328	,67402	,08425
Excitement	1,00	91	4,0000	,68718	,07204
	2,00	64	4,2813	,67774	,08472
Esteem	1,00	91	3,7198	,84725	,08882
	2,00	64	4,3359	,71300	,08913
Diversion	1,00	91	3,5659	,94048	,09859
	2,00	64	4,0938	,87230	,10904

Independent Samples Test										
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Socialization	Equal variances assumed	5,276	,023	-4,363	153	,000	-,64990	,14896	-,94419	-,35561
	Equal variances not assumed			-4,539	150,656	,000	-,64990	,14318	-,93280	-,36700
Performance	Equal variances assumed	,002	,969	-2,659	153	,009	-,30314	,11401	-,52839	-,07790
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,687	140,637	,008	-,30314	,11282	-,52619	-,08010
Excitement	Equal variances assumed	1,367	,244	-2,523	153	,013	-,28125	,11147	-,50148	-,06102
	Equal variances not assumed			-2,529	136,929	,013	-,28125	,11120	-,50115	-,06135
Esteem	Equal variances assumed	1,067	,303	-4,753	153	,000	-,61616	,12965	-,87229	-,36002
	Equal variances not assumed			-4,897	148,052	,000	-,61616	,12582	-,86480	-,36752
OverallDiversion	Equal variances assumed	,743	,390	-3,544	153	,001	-,52782	,14895	-,82208	-,23355
	Equal variances not assumed			-3,591	141,782	,000	-,52782	,14700	-,81841	-,23722

Figure 8: Group Statistics and Independent Samples test for H3

High involvement fans reported significantly higher values for socialization ($M = 4.17$, $SD = .79$) compared with low involvement fans ($M = 3.52$, $SD = .99$) ($t(155) = -4.363$, $p < .001$) as displayed in Figure 8. In addition, high involvement fans reported significantly higher values for performance ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .67$) compared with low involvement fans ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .72$) ($t(155) = -2.659$, $p = .009$). For excitement, high involvement fans reported significantly higher levels ($M = 4.28$, $SD = .6774$) than less involved fans ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .69$) ($t(155) = -2.523$, $p = .013$). For esteem high involvement fans again report significantly higher values ($M = 4.34$, $SD = .71$) compared with low involvement fans ($M = 3.72$, $SD = .85$) ($t(155) = -4.753$, $p < .001$). The same is true for the last one of the five, diversion, since high involvement fans reported significantly higher values ($M = 4.10$, $SD = .87$) than low involvement fans ($M = 3.57$

SD = .94) ($t(155) = -3.544, p=.001$). All of the SPEED facets are significantly higher for high involvement fans than for less involved fans. So, the third hypothesis is supported. However, it should be again noted here that the Cronbach's alpha for both performance and excitement was below 0.7.

H4: The five SPEED facets act as mediating variables, and fans that demonstrate higher levels of involvement also report higher levels for SPEED facets, which in turn increases their intentions to view matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others.

The fourth hypothesis was tested with linear regression analysis. The mediation effect of the SPEED facets was measured by utilizing Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure. In order to test mediation, indexes were created for both the SPEED facets and the intentions. Figure 9 displays the mediation model that was tested. C path, which is not visible in the Figure 9, is the direct path between level of involvement and intentions.

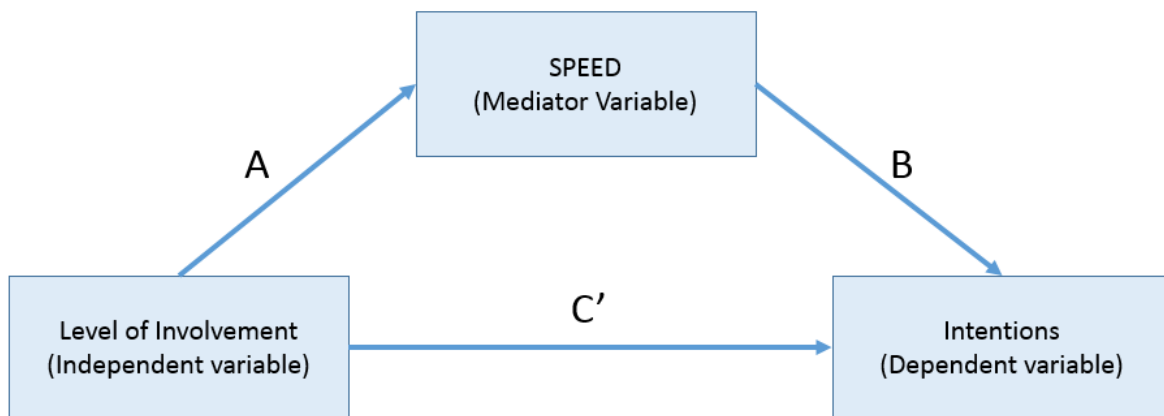


Figure 9: H4: Model

The first step was to measure the C path. This is also referred to as the direct path as the mediator variable is not included. The results are presented below in Figure 10.

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
1	,589 ^a	,347	,342	,52795	,347	F Change	df1	df2	
						81,201	1	153	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Involvement

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	22,633	1	22,633	81,201	,000 ^b
	Residual	42,646	153	,279		
	Total	65,279	154			

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions

b. Predictors: (Constant), Involvement

Coefficients ^a					
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	
1	(Constant)	1,301	,312		,000
	OverallInvolvement	,642	,071	,589	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions

Figure 10: Model summary, ANOVA, and Coefficients tables for direct path (C)

The data indicates that the level of involvement affected the intentions significantly ($F(1,153) = 81.20$, $p < .001$). The results stated that as involvement increased, intentions also increased ($B = 0.642$, $t = 9.01$, $p < .001$).

The A path from Figure 9 was significant as well. The results are presented in Figure 11 below.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	,494 ^a	,244	,239	,46354	,244	49,361	1	153	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Involvement

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10,606	1	10,606	49,361	,000 ^b
	Residual	32,875	153	,215		
	Total	43,482	154			

a. Dependent Variable: SPEED

b. Predictors: (Constant), Involvement

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2,014	,274		7,342	,000
	Involvement	,440	,063	,494	7,026	,000

a. Dependent Variable: SPEED

Figure 11: Model summary, ANOVA, and Coefficients tables for A path

The results show that the level of involvement was a significant ($F(1,153) = 49.36, p < .001$) predictor for SPEED facets. The results stated that as involvement increased, the SPEED facets also increased ($B = 0.440, t = 7.026, p < .001$).

The results for the regression analysis for B path are presented in Figure 12 below.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	,600 ^a	,360	,356	,52245	,360	86,153	1	153	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), SPEED

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	23,516	1	23,516	86,153	,000 ^b
	Residual	41,763	153	,273		
	Total	65,279	154			

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions

b. Predictors: (Constant), SPEED

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1,205	,314		3,840	,000
	SPEED	,735	,079	,600	9,282	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions

Figure 12: Model summary, ANOVA, and Coefficients tables for B path

A linear regression analysis for the B path found that the SPEED facets were a statistically significant ($F(1, 153) = 86.15$, $p < .001$) predictor for the intentions. The results indicate that as SPEED facets increased, intentions also increased ($B = 0.735$, $t = 9.282$, $p < .001$).

To test for mediation, multiple regression analysis was conducted with the intentions as dependent variable and involvement and SPEED facets as the predictors. The results are presented in Figure 13 below.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics			Sig. F Change
						F Change	df1	df2	
1	,688 ^a	,473	,466	,47560	,473	68,300	2	152	,000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Involvement, SPEED

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	30,898	2	15,449	68,300	,000 ^b
	Residual	34,381	152	,226		
	Total	65,279	154			

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions

b. Predictors: (Constant), Involvement, SPEED

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	,291	,327		,888	,376
	SPEED	,501	,083	,409	6,045	,000
	Involvement	,422	,074	,387	5,713	,000

a. Dependent Variable: Intentions

Figure 13: Model summary, ANOVA, and Coefficients tables for the model (C' path)

Figure 13 shows that the model is significant ($F(2, 152) = 68.15$, $p < .001$) with both SPEED and involvement as predictors. This means that both involvement and the SPEED facets are significant predictors for intentions, and as they increase, intentions increase significantly ($B = 0.501$, $t = 6.045$, $p < .001$). This was also true for the B path as SPEED facets increased, intentions also increased ($B = 0.422$, $t = 9.282$, $p < .001$), as reported in Figure 12. These results mean that as involvement increases, SPEED facets also increase, which in turn predict an increase in intentions.

By comparing the standardized betas it can also be inferred that with SPEED included in the model ($\beta = 0.409$, $t = 6.045$, $p < .001$), the model is improved compared to using only intentions as the predictor ($\beta = 0.387$, $t = 5.713$, $p < .001$). The results indicate that SPEED is more important predictor in this model.

To test for full mediation, the C and the C' path were compared. There is no full mediation, because Unstandardized B of C' path (0.422) did not decrease to zero. Although there is not full mediation, there is still partial mediation, since the model is improved by the inclusion of SPEED facets. This was examined by conducting the Sobel test. The Sobel test was conducted using the interactive calculation tool by Preacher and Leonardelli (n.d.) and the results are displayed in Figure 14 below.

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	.440	Sobel test:	4.56687003	0.04826938
b	.501	Aroian test:	4.54030682	0.04855178
s _a	.063	Goodman test:	4.59390498	0.04798532
s _b	.083	Reset all	Calculate	

Figure 14: Sobel test calculation with Preacher and Leonardelli's (n.d) interactive calculation tool

The Sobel test confirms the partial mediation. This means that the fourth hypothesis is not fully supported by empirical evidence from the primary research.

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

This thesis aimed to build on the previous sport consumer literature by researching Finnish football consumers. The main findings of this study support the existing literature. The two hypotheses not supported by empirical evidence from the primary research provided interesting results and a need for further interpretation. The second hypothesis about the fans of teams abroad seems to contradict the current view.

There is a consensus among the academia that highly involved consumers display certain behaviors. This notion was supported by this thesis' research (H1). The findings imply that the consumers' perceived involvement is a valid measurement that correlates with their intentions to view matches, purchase merchandise, and recommend the team to others. What characterizes the word-of-mouth culture amongst football fans was that 92% of the respondents reported that they discuss the team with others and 97% reported that they tell others what their favorite team is. These findings support the previous research, as Dwyer et al. (2015) research also found that fans like to discuss their team with others and recruit others. This implies that fans offer a significant marketing possibility for the team as they actively talk about the team.

The obvious implication that the first hypothesis provides would be that teams' need to increase their involvement with the fans and this will result in more viewers for matches, and more merchandise sold. The more difficult part is how teams can increase involvement. The open-ended question at the end of the questionnaire provided the respondents with a chance to voice their thoughts on this. Most wanted cheaper tickets, but more interaction between the fans and the team was another popular one. Suggestions apart from these two popular topics varied greatly from putting more effort to the match events to being more active on social media.

However, as the results from fourth hypothesis confirmed, involvement is not the only driver of fan behavior. SPEED facets were found to partially mediate the effect of involvement on the intentions. This means that involvement is not the only major factor, but consumers also place value on, for instance, the team's achievements (esteem) and the social aspects that being a

fan gives to people. This notion is also supported by the results of the open-ended question at the end questionnaire.

The results from the third hypothesis support the use of five SPEED facets in sport consumer research, since for all of the facets high involvement fans reported higher values. This means that the facets can be utilized to measure fan behavior in a broader way while researching fans, even though the model was developed for and tested with attendance in the original study by Funk et al. (2009). In addition, as reported in the results of the fourth hypothesis, the inclusion of SPEED index improved the model.

One interesting finding that contradicts the hypothesis 2a was that the Finnish fans that support a Finnish team reported higher levels of involvement compared with non-Finnish teams' fans. Most of the research conducted on Finnish fans that support a team from abroad have been qualitative, such Soininen's (2016) research. Soininen's (2016) study found that Finnish fans that supported a team from abroad had similar connection to it, although Soininen also pointed out that the community is different for the fans that support a team from abroad. Ahola's (2016) research utilized both quantitative and qualitative research and found that most of the fans did not feel that they were part of the community although they identified as fans. The fans were also reported saying that they perceive as they support their team similarly like the local Finnish teams' fans. However, neither of the two studies in question included local Finnish fans as a point of comparison.

In addition, the non-Finnish teams' fans reported lower intentions for viewing matches and recommending the team to others. Only intention to purchase merchandise reported no significant differences between the two types of fans. The reason why there is no significant difference in merchandise purchase intention could be explained by differences in non-Finnish teams' and Finnish teams' merchandising. Big European teams usually have a wider selection that is more easily attainable. Some Finnish teams' fans even reported that their team's selection is too narrow or the items are not sold anywhere in response to why they had not purchased merchandise.

However, while discussing the non-Finnish teams' fans it should be noted that the sample included only 26 fans that supported non-Finnish teams, which is quite small for a quantitative research. This number was below what was expected considering all the empirical evidence.

There could be several explanations for this. Firstly, most of the respondents were reached via an online discussion forum that has sections for both Finnish and international football leagues, but the section under which the survey was posted is more popular amongst Finnish football fans since most of the topics there address Finnish football. Another reason for why the sample included a smaller amount of fans of teams from other countries is that when a fan with two favorite teams is given the option to choose they prefer the local team. In this instance, this effect might be bolstered by the context. However, this theory cannot be proven with the data obtained from this research, but would need to be tested separately. The limitations that the number of non-Finnish teams' fans imposed was discussed previously in the limitations section.

The usual constraints for attending matches for consumers were the distance and ticket prices. Suggestions by the fans included lower ticket prices and campaigns. This supports Dale et al. (2005) research that campaigns are a way to get less involved fans to attend matches, however as Winfree (2009) found for the most hard core fans the demand for tickets is fairly inelastic. Derived from this it can be concluded that ticket campaigns are a functioning marketing tool especially for the less involved fans.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 Main Findings

This thesis' objective was to further gain understanding about football consumers in Finland. Football fans operate differently from consumers in other fields. The high involvement of football fans affects their behavioral intentions to purchase merchandise, view or attend matches, and recommend the team to their friends. This has been discussed in many academic papers and it is proven in this thesis.

However, as discussed in this thesis there is more to analyze in order to fully explain the fans' motives behind their intentions as involvement is not the only factor. Socialization, performance, excitement, esteem, and diversion were found to partially mediate consumers' intentions. As involvement increased, SPEED facets increased which in turn increased the intended fan behavior.

This study also analyzed differences among Finnish fans that support a local team and a team from abroad. This study found that there is a difference in how the fans perceive involvement although, based on the previous literature, it was not expected.

6.2 Implications for International Business

As discussed in the literature review, football fans and sport consumers have been studied in numerous research, but Finnish football fans are a less researched segment. Football fans have generally been understood through involvement and this thesis' findings are in line with that perspective, as highly involved fans indicated higher intentions for fan behavior. For teams, these findings suggest that teams should focus on building fan involvement, but also understand the diversity of the factors that motivate fans.

Furthermore, teams should understand that fans differ from each other. Not only do Finnish fans' behavior vary depending on their involvement with the team, there are also differences

between local fans and fans of teams abroad that should be considered in the teams' marketing efforts.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

This study had limitations, which could be avoided in further research. The limitations imposed by the current sample could be addressed in further research. For instance, a more evenly distributed sample would help assess whether the results can be extrapolated to females. The conceptual framework could also be tested in another culture to see if there are differences.

Furthermore, the differences between consumers that support a team from another country could be studied more, using a quantitative method with a larger sample. Another quantitative research could confirm whether the differences found in this study are found in a sample collected using other sampling method.

Lastly the conceptual framework could be modified to measure if it is valid for other sports or even other industries where high involvement is typical, such as music or politics.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

The online questionnaire

This is a survey conducted by a student of the Aalto University School of Business for a Bachelor's Thesis. The survey takes approximately 8 minutes to complete, and all the results are anonymous and fully confidential. The data will only be used for the thesis.

The purpose of this survey is to examine football fans.

If you do not watch football or do not have a favorite team, please exit the survey.

If you have any additional questions or concerns, you can contact me at (sami.sutinen@aalto.fi) or my thesis supervisor, Dr. Suzanne Altobello at altobello.research@gmail.com.

1. Nationality *

☐ Finnish

☐ Other, please specify:

2. Favorite football team (if many, please choose one) *

☐ Finnish team

☐ Team from abroad

3. Name of the team *

Write the name of your favorite team *

4. Consider your behaviors with your favorite team and check all of the below activities that apply:

- ☐ I wear team clothing.
- ☐ I have visited the team's website this season.
- ☐ I follow the team on social media.
- ☐ I watch the team's matches on Tv or internet.
- ☐ I have attended at least one live match this season.
- ☐ I buy team merchandise (e.g, scarfs, stickers, jackets).
- ☐ I tell others what my favorite team is.
- ☐ I discuss the team with others.

5. Why don't you buy your favorite team's merchandise? *

6. Why don't you follow your favorite team on social media? *

7. Why haven't you attended matches? *

8. Please rate the following statements *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I consider myself to be more of a fan than just a spectator *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am loyal to my team, even if they are not winning *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am a part of my favourite team's fan community *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have a connection with my favorite team *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am committed to my favorite team *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I identify myself as a supporter of my favorite team *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I support my favorite team *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am willing to change my favorite team *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My favorite team is a part of who I am *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Please rate how important the following aspects are for you as a supporter of a team *

	Not important at all	Not important	Neither important nor not important	Important	Very important
The opportunity to interact with other people *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The chance to socialize with others *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The games are very exciting *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The excitement associated with the games *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The ability to get away from the tension in my life *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The gracefulness associated with the game *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The break it provides me from my daily routine *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The sense of accomplishment I get when my team wins *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The natural elegance of the game *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The feeling like I have won when my team wins *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Please rate the following statements *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
I will recommend my favorite team's games to friends *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to watch or attend my favorite team's games in the near future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will watch or attend my favorite team's games in the near future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is likely I will watch or attend my favorite team's games in the near future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to purchase my favorite team's merchandise in the near future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is likely I will purchase my favorite team's merchandise in the near future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I expect to recommend my favorite team's games to friends *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is likely I will recommend my favorite team's games to friends *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will purchase my favorite team's merchandise in the near future *	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Gender *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female
- ☐ Other

12. Age *

13. What recommendations do you have for your favorite team to INCREASE fan involvement in the team activities? *

14. How did you hear about this survey? *

- ☐ From a URL link received from the survey creator
- ☐ From a link shared on a online discussion board
- ☐ From a link shared on social media
- ☐ From a link shared from a friend
- ☐ Other (please clarify)